

Taiwan

Facts and Statistics

Location: Eastern Asia, islands bordering the East China Sea, Philippine Sea, South China Sea, and Taiwan Strait, north of the Philippines, off the southeastern coast of China

Capital: Taipei

Climate: tropical; marine; rainy season during southwest monsoon (June to August); cloudiness is persistent and extensive all year

Population: 22,858,872 (July 2007 est.)

Ethnic Make-up: Taiwanese (including Hakka) 84%, mainland Chinese 14%, indigenous 2%

Religions: mixture of Buddhist and Taoist 93%, Christian 4.5%, other 2.5%

Government: multiparty democracy

Language in Taiwan

The official language of Taiwan is Mandarin Chinese, but because many Taiwanese are of southern Fujianese descent, Min-nan (the Southern Min dialect, or Holo) is also widely spoken. The smaller groups of Hakka people and aborigines have also preserved their own languages. Many elderly people can also speak some Japanese, as they were subjected to Japanese education before Taiwan was returned to Chinese rule in 1945 after the Japanese occupation which lasted for half a century. The most popular foreign language in Taiwan is English, which is part of the regular school curriculum.

Taiwanese People, Society and Culture

The People

Taiwan's population is mostly Han Chinese who were born on the mainland or have ancestors that were. They are divided into three groups based on the dialect of Chinese they speak: Taiwanese, Hakka, and Mandarin. Taiwan also has a small population of aborigines who comprise about 2 percent of the total population.

Most people in Taiwan have traditional values based on Confucian ethics; however, pressures from industrialization are now challenging these values. Still, some traditional values remain strong, including piety toward parents, ancestor worship, a strong emphasis on education and work, and the importance of "face." Since industrialization, women enjoy greater freedom and a higher social status, individual creativity is regarded as equally important as social conformity and acquiring material goods and recognition is increasingly important.

Some tensions exist between social groups. The majority of people in Taiwan came from or have ancestors who came from mainland China before 1949. They are known as Taiwanese and enjoy the highest standard of living in Taiwan. Because of their wealth and numbers, they also have the greatest influence on economic and political issues.

Mainlanders are people who arrived in Taiwan after mainland China fell to the Communists in 1949. Many Mainlanders work for the government. Tensions between Taiwanese and Mainlanders have eased substantially. The aborigines, who live mainly in rural villages, are the least privileged social group in Taiwan.

Confucianism

The teachings of Confucius describe the position of the individual in society. Confucianism is a system of behaviours and ethics that stress the obligations of people towards one another based upon their relationship. The basic tenets are based upon five different relationships:

- Ruler and subject
- Husband and wife

- Parents and children
- Brothers and sisters
- Friend and friend

Confucianism stresses duty, loyalty, honor, filial piety, respect for age and seniority, and sincerity.

Harmony / Group Relations

Due to the Confucian tenets Taiwanese culture is a collective one. There is a need to belong to a group larger than themselves, be it their family, school, work group, or country. They treat people with respect and dignity regardless of their personal feelings. In order to maintain a sense of harmony, they will act with decorum at all times and not do anything to cause someone else public embarrassment. They are willing to subjugate their own feelings for the good of the group.

The Concept of Face / *Mien-tzu*

The concept of face is extremely important to the Taiwanese. Face is difficult to translate into words but essentially reflects a person's reputation, dignity, and prestige. Face can be lost, saved or given to another person. Companies, as well as individuals, have face and this often provides the rationale behind business and personal interactions.

> Giving Face

Face can be given to people by complimenting them, showing them respect, or doing anything that increases their self-esteem. Specific examples include:

- Complimenting individuals (be careful not to single out individuals when the work was a corporate effort)
- Praising group (company, school, family, country)

> Losing Face

You can cause someone to lose face by causing someone embarrassment, and/or tarnishing their image and reputation. Examples include:

- Direct or indirect criticism of an individual or group
- Giving someone a gift that is beneath their status
- Turning down an invitation or a gesture of friendship
- Not keeping your word
- Demonstrations of anger or excessive emotionalism

> Saving Face

In the event that you cause someone to lose face, or someone is embarrassed by circumstances that arise, the best recourse is to appropriate blame for problems that arise. For example:

- Appropriating blame for problems that arise:
- "Perhaps I didn't explain myself clearly."
- "Oh that kind of thing happens in our country too."
- "I have done the same thing myself."

"Guanxi" – Connections/Relationships

Most Taiwanese business is conducted among friends, friends of friends, and family. Such connections, or "guanxi" (pronounced gwan-she) are developed with people at your own level or of a higher status in both business and social situations. "Guanxi" opens doors, smoothes out problems, and leads to even more connections.